



News Release

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UDOH Recommends First Dental Visit by Age One *Recent Survey Data Show Increase in Dentists Seeing Patients at an Early Age But there is Still Room to Improve*

(Salt Lake City UT) – Having your children's first dental visit by one year of age or within six months of the first tooth erupting, whichever comes first, can help improve your children's oral health. Recent survey data collected by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) show an increase in the percentage of Utah dentists seeing children at one year of age. However many are still not seeing children until they are older which may be too late.

“Waiting until age three for first visit to the dentist, which was the previous recommendation, is too late for some children because cavities can start much younger than that,” said Dr. Steven Steed, Dental Director, Oral Health Program, UDOH. “By bringing your children in early, dentists can educate you on how to prevent cavities before they start. Children who see the dentist early are more likely to have a healthy mouth as they grow up.”

The survey of general and pediatric dentists determined how many dentists see young children and at what age they begin taking pediatric patients. Twenty-four percent of all the responding dentists said they start seeing children at one year old and 36 percent start seeing children at two years old. These rates show an improvement from a previous survey conducted in 2001, which indicated 16 percent and 32 percent respectively. However, in this year's survey, forty percent started seeing patients at ages three through six. All of the pediatric dentists surveyed said they start seeing children by age one year.

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Dr Steed recommends that parents prepare for their child's first visit by lifting the baby's lip and checking their teeth. At the visit, he encourages parents to ask questions such as:

- What is the proper way to brush my baby's teeth?
- Which toothpaste should I use?
- What are the white spots on the teeth (if the child's teeth have any white spots)?
- Are the teeth erupting in the right order?
- Is it better to suck on thumb and fingers or a pacifier?
- When does my child need to stop sucking and how can I help them stop?
- Does drinking from a bottle at this age hurt my baby's teeth? What about a sippy cup?

Additionally, during the first visit, the dentist can talk to parents about the need for fluoride supplements (if there is not enough in the water) and how to avoid passing tooth decay-causing bacteria to their child. For example, parents may not be aware that if they put the spoon of baby food in their mouth first to see if it's too hot and then put it into the baby's mouth, or if they clean a pacifier that was dropped by licking it and then putting it into their baby's mouth, they can transfer their decay-causing germs to their baby.

The UDOH Oral Health Program, the Utah Dental Association (UDA) and the Utah Dental Hygienists' Association have completed several activities throughout the state to promote the first dental visit by age one or within six months of the first tooth erupting. They include visits to local dental societies, presentations to local health departments, presentations at conferences, newsletter articles and brochures.

For more information, contact the UDOH Oral Health Program at (801) 538-9711 or visit <http://health.utah.gov/oralhealth>.

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